DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 023 105 CG 002 494

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Cultural Differences Implications for Counseling.

American Personnel and Guidance Association, Washington, D.C.

Pub Date 10 Apr 68

Note-20p.; Speech presented at the American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention, Detroit, Michigan, April 7-11, 1968.

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.10

Descriptors-*American Indians, *Counseling, Counselor Training, *Cultural Differences, *Mexican Americans, Minority Groups, *Negroes, Socioeconomic Influences

This paper discusses four cultural minority groups: American Indians, Appalachian Whites, Spanish Americans, and American Negroes. The general characteristics of which a counselor should be aware are emphasized. The cultural ties and the suspicion and anger towards the dominant white culture or "outsider" found in each group hinder counseling relationships. Frequent mistakes of counselors with minority group clients are outlined. Changes in counselor training and in-service education of counselors are necessary, so that counselors can bridge cultural barriers and become more effective. (NS)

Cultural Differences: Implications for Counseling*

by

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Currently, the terms culturally deprived, educationally deprived, underprivileged, and disadvantaged are being used to describe segments of the American population which continue to challenge social institutions, agencies, and professionals intent on improving the lot of the "other Americans." To date, ameliorative efforts have not been encouraging. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for the apparent lack of success has been the labels themselves, for they imply that certain groups are without or somehow lacking in culture.

It should be clear that the social science use of the term "culture" implies that everyone except a newborn babe "has culture" (Sutherland, Woodward, & Maxwell, 1956, p. 17). Individuals who are born into a society assume the general behavior dicated by that society; they acquire the culture of that society (Benedict, 1934, p. 235). Further, it should be noted that complex societies like the United States contain not just one homogeneous culture, but a multitude of ethnic and regional sub-cultures with which people identify and from which they derive distinctive values and norms (Broom & Selznick, 1963, p. 60). Each group, although simultaneously a part of the larger culture, considers its way of life natural. Strange groups, beliefs, or practices are treated, ipso facto, with suspicion and hostility. Although cultural minorities identify themselves as Americans,

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* A paper presented at the APGA Convention, April 10, 1968, Detroit, Michigan.

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they show intense loyality to their immediate group.

While their ethnocentrism gives them a sense of identity, strength, and security, it simultaneously warps their views of themselves and others (Lee, 1966, p. 343). They may become so completely loyal to the demands and expectations of their ethnic group that they devaluate or reject values, norms, and individuals who are different from those which they know.

Although several cultural minorities exist in this country, four major groups stand out in bold relief. They are American Indians, Applachian or "mountain" whites, Spanish heritage groups, and American Negroes. These segments demand the attention of governmental and social agencies, because great numbers of their members are beset by social, educational, and economics disability.

The Cultural Minorities

In a previous article (Vontress, 1967a), a more extensive conceptual development of cultural differences was undertaken. It was pointed out that exclusion variables such as race, language, and cultural heritage operate singly or interactively to create social distance between individuals with perceptible differences and the general population. Here, this thesis, in somewhat different terms, is reiterated and related to the work of the counselor.

American Indians. According to the 1960 Census, there are approximately 523,591 Indians in this country. Nearly 75 percent of them live on 277 separate areas of land, plus thirty groups of scattered public domain allotments and other off-reservation lands, which are maintained in Federal trusteeship for Indian use and benefit (United States Department of Interior, 1965, p. 11). These figures exclude Alaska where there

are two Federal reservations, public domain allotments, and more than 90 other Government owned areas. While many of these areas, such as the Pueblos of New Mexico, the colonies of Nevada, and the "rancherias" of California, are not ordinarily referred to as "reservations," that, for all practical purposes, is what they are.

These areas range in size all the way from tiny settlements in California, comprising only a few acreas, to the 13 million acres Navajo Reservation which stretches across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, covering an area equal to several of the smaller Eastern States combined; or to put it differently, an area the size of Belgium and the Netherlands put together (Evaluation of the Role of..., 1967, p. 3).

It is important to understand the complexities of the various Indian sub-cultures. Korfonta (1968) points out that there are rather sharp ethnic differences between the various tribes with attendant variations in social and economic backgrounds. In part, these differences stem from their historical way of life. For example, the agricultural Indians known as the Civilized Tribes had a culture that was vastly different from that of the Nomadic Plains Indians who relied upon game for sustance. Today, there exist considerable economic and cultural differences between the reservation Indians and those who live as individuals in our society.

Unemployment rates differ among tribal groups. Some reservations have unemployment rates in excess of seventy percent of the tribal labor force. The largest tribe, the Navajos, with an estimated population of 100,000, or one-fourth of all Indians on reservations, is experiencing a forty-five percent unemployment rate (according to the March, 1966, survey made by the Bureau of Indian Affairs). This rate is three times

that for other nonwhites and three to four times the rate in pockets of heavy unemployment in other job market areas in the nation.

Not all Indians, however, are poverty-striken. In this connection, Oklahoma presents a land of contrast. On one hand, there are millionaire Indians who have made money in oil; on the other, there are the poor illiterate Indians who can barely speak English or speak none at all, those who still must converse in their own language, and who can read and write no language, who still harbor considerable resentment against the white man, and who strongly resist assimilation (Evaluation of the Role of..., 1967, p. 46).

Although Indian sub-groups differ, there are general characteristics which demand the counselor's consideration, if he is to be successful working with them. First, there appears to be no abatement in the Indian's attachment and loyality to the reservation and its way of life. They fear and resent invaders, especially those who would change their traditions. On some reservations, schools, staffed by whites, are suspect, for the elders feel that the facilities are instrumentalities of the whites, designed to inculcate Indian children with alien values and transform them into "whites" (Wax, 1963).

As the complexity of modern living increases, Indians residing off reservations yearn to return to the culture they know and their friends who give them psychological and physical support. Each unpleasant encounter with "the white man" confirms his suspicion of the dominant group and reinforces his decision not to assimilate.

Thus, the Indian, on or off the reservation, may present a significant challenge to the white counselor, not only because the counselor does not understand the various Indian cultures, but because

he is generally viewed with reserve, suspicion, or hostility by many Indians, especially those who cling to their tribal identity and traditional cultural values. Significant among such values is their assuming at an early age responsibility for the behavior and activity choices they make.

Non-verbal communication is highly developed among many tribes; and using few words in their daily lives, maturing individuals learn more from observation than they do from verbal exchange (Stillwell & Allen, 1966). Thus, in the counseling interview, Indian taciturnity may inhibit fluency to the extent that the professional counselor has difficulty communicating even with educated and apparently assimilated Indians. Indeed, lack of understanding of, and familiarity with, the Indian and his cultures can very well create so much insecurity in the trained counselor that he is rendered professionally powerless to assist Indian clients in any way. Further, his naivete and difference may render his words inaudible to suspicious ears.

The Appalachians. "Appalachians" or " moùtain whites" is used to refer to countless individuals who continue to live close to the soil in various parts of rural United States. Remaining existence-oriented, the mountaineer has been and still is concerned primarily with eking a living out of worn-out soil. The middle-class person's desire for things and more things: a new car, a bigger house, a Florida vacation, a community that has social and cultural advantages--such an orientation is difficult for most mountaineers to understand or accept.

Bred in the tradition of backwoods America, the appalachian is strongly independent; and although others may see him as poor, as

lower-class, or in need of assistance, he may perceive none of these. Instead, he sees himself as good as anyone else, because he is "free, white, and twenty-one," a native American rather than an immigrant or foreigner. This is probably why he is suspicious of people who say they want to help him, for he often sees offers of assistance as threats to the control of his own situation (Charleston Youth Community, Inc., 1963, ch. 5).

Appalachians seek to avoid or reject new things, new ideas, and "new people" (Health, Education, and Welfare, 1964, p. 2). They detest modern bureaucratic procedures. This includes modern offices, forms to fill out, prying personal questions, and folks in city clothes. Even so, society continues to change around them; and it appears that the more society changes, the more they long to go back to the "good old days." Much of their talk, gossip, and songs is backward oriented: how things used to be, how much better things were, what fun people used to have, how "everybody" went to church then, as if the good old days held the only joy. They see the tomorrows in their lives filled with sorrow, fear, frustrations, and disappointments. Thus, in many ways appalachian culture is regressive.

Despair came to Appalachia when work demanding sweat of the brow began to disappear. What work there is around is in town in the industrial plants, and it is primarily for women, not men. So the man is disfranchized in his home, for he is no longer the sole breadwinner. His family begins to show signs of disintegration. The man must leave home to go to the big city in search of work to keep his family going.

Although families are breaking up, and even though their strong and fierce feelings of kinship breeds suspicion of anyone else, the families of Appalachia have held together for longer periods, and in situations of greater adversity, than families of most other American subcultural groups. As their way of life changes, "foreigners" fan out across the countryside, seeking to help, but help is difficult, for the mountaineer's raw ethnocentrism impedes the development of feelings of identity and empathy, which seem essential for the adjustment of social and cultural differences. It is difficult for the professionally trained counselor to break through the hill folk' instinctive distrust of outsiders and "all their city ways."

Finally, the counselor who would work successfully around mountain whites should be aware that in sparsely populated areas, there are few opportunities for spontaneous interaction within walking distance (Copp, 1966). Therefore, little of the rural youth's time is spent with his peer group. Most of it is spent in and around the home, in which members of the family communicate with great economy of language. Thus, to the outsider, the mountaineer undoubtedly appears reserve and taciturn. It is understandable that the professional counselor may assess such individuals as fearful, uncommunicative, hostile, or retarded.

Spanish heritage groups. It is sophomoric to think of a Spanish-speaking or Spanish surname people in the United States. Not all persons of Spanish heritage with Spanish-sounding names speak Spanish; and not all persons of Spanish heritage or who speak Spanish have Spanish-sounding names.

Although there are several different Spanish heritage group in this country, two principal ones are Spanish-Americans or Mexican-Americans, who live predominantly in the Southwestern part of the United States; and the Puerto Ricans, who are concentrated in New York City and other East Coast cities, although a number of them is now migrating to Chicago and other midwestern cities (Burchinal, 1965). Despite differences in their historical backgrounds and length of time in the United Statds, these two groups share several common patterns and confront many similar problems.

In addition to the language heritage of the two groups, they both come from rural backgrounds. Although they now find themselves in the United States, their value orientations typically reflect traditionalism, familism, paternalism, and resignation to conditions of life. Also, the low value they place on education is congruent with a simple division of labor, a higher value on self-sufficiency than riches, and an oral rather than a written tradition.

In general, Spanish heritage groups have a strong attachment to the hearth and are uneasy when they are away from the characteristics of a familiar environment and their cultural peers (Manpower Programs..., 1967, p. 39). This ethos is so pronounced that general ambivalence and suspicion are accorded their peers who become "successful," for they assume that success is achieved by cooperating with the Anglo out-group and by betraying one's own.

To some extent, their feelings of estrangement and alienation from the dominant cultural group are caused by the perpetual <u>faux pas</u> which Anglos make around them. For example, those who know some Spanish

often start speaking in Spanish immediately when they meet someone with a "Spanish" face, thinking that they are thereby establishing rapport. In reality, according to some Spanish-speaking observers, they are unwittingly and bluntly proclaiming to the individual that they consider him different. Because of the widespread belief among Mexican-Americans that Anglos consider the Spanish language inferior, they may think the speaking of Spanish by the Anglo is belittling them.

Frequently, too, the individual is embarrassed to speak his patois Spanish to an individual who speaks "School Spanish." Instead of conversing in his broken Spanish, he insists on using broken English. It's less embarrassing that way. This observation seems significant in view of suggestions made by some authorities that more Spanish-speaking counselors be made available for people in Spanish-heritage enclaves in this country. There is some question that such counselors could bridge communication barriers any more effectively than sensitive counselors who know little or no Spanish, for the former, with their school Spanish indicate willy-nilly their superiority and difference to clients.

Further, some facets of the Anglo character may be offensive to individuals of Spanish heritage. For example, the jocular, hail-fellow tone which conveys friendliness to some dominant group members may appear to the Mexican-American to be rude and insulting. The crisp, business-like manner to which Anglo counselees are accustomed may appear curt and cold to individuals accustomed to more elaborate forms of greetings and courtesy.

The Negro. In this country, race has an isolating effect upon social groups, for social interaction is warped and confined by its indelible marks (Eldredge, 1957, p. 255). The Negro is assigned to a

separate social category, where he is unable to participate in social interaction to the same extent as the white man. It is because of this exclusion that nearly six out of every ten Negroes feel that whites either want to suppress them or are indifferent to their plight (Brink & Harris, 1964, p. 126). For James Baldwin, this is the root of the Negro's dispute with America: that he has so little freedom and power to direct his own affairs simply and solely because of his skin color (Jones, 1966).

The Negro's color and the unique conditions under which it forces him to live have telling effects on him. His blackness and the dominant group's reaction to it cause to swell up in him deep feelings of self-rejection, cultural alienation, and social estrangement, which pervade and corrupt his personality (Essien-Udom, 1964, p. 141). As a member of a downtroddened reference group, he not only tends to despise his group but also to hate himself for being a member of the group (Vontress, 1966).

Keller (1963), Stevenson and Stewart (1958), and Ausubel and Ausubel (1963) are among the many researchers and observers who indicate that Negro children, even before they start to school, are aware of their racial status in this country. From the moment the black child is born, he lives in a world in which the white man is placed before him as an ideal, while the Negro is discriminated against and looked down on.

Devoid of a cultural heritage which enables a child to look at himself and acquire a feeling of strength and worth in terms of the people from which he came, the Negro child becomes confused in regard to his feelings about himself and others who look like or remind him of himself. He would like to think well of himself, but the impact of his culture and

its evaluation of his racial group lead to self-hatred and rejection of his group and hostility toward others.

Not only does the Negro reject himself, but he rejects the society which causes him to reject himself (Pierce-Jones, Reid, & King, 1959). In specific terms, he rejects members of that society which he perceives as the source of his problems. These are, in the main, white people. According to Fromm (1939), "the attitude toward others and toward ourselves, far from being contradictory, runs basically parallel..." Such insight raises an interesting question. Does the Negro hate the dominant society, because he first hates himself; or does he hate himself, because of anti-Negro attitudes in the dominant culture of which he is a part?

In any case, it seems safe to say that being a Negro in the United States today holds certain implications for the individual, no matter how little prejudice seems to have affected his personality (Gochros, 1966). His relationships not only to society at large but to parents, grandparents, and siblings are in some measure affected by the color of his skin; there is indeed no inter- or intra-personal problem that is not influenced by how he and his predecessors as well as his peers have reacted to that fact.

Membership in a minority group tends to lead to certain habitual ways of relating initially to a member of the majority group (Rosen & Frank, 1951). During the beginning stages of the therapeutic encounter, the Negro counselee may show sullen reserve, resentful anxiety, distrust, overt hostility, and/or loquacious and obsequious over-affability. How the white counselor handles this phase of the relationship determines its duration and his effectiveness with the Negro client.

The client's physical appearance, the counselor's unfamiliarity with the Negro culture and problems, and the overt or covert hostility the client brings to the interview can easily cause the counselor to make obvious mistakes in the counseling process. First, his own basic insecurity with the client may render him professionally impotent (Adams, 1950). Secondly, there is considerable danger of his identifying with the client and feeling too sympathetic to be of real assistance. Thirdly, the counselor may feel in himself remnants of majority group prejudices and feel too guilty to be of help (Heine, 1950). In attempting to conceal his insecurity and guilt feelings, he may become overly sympathetic and indulgent. However, his greatest danger may be a tendency to ascribe all problems of Negroes to cultural and racial conflict. Thus, he may attempt to treat "the Negro Problem" rather than the particular problem of the particular client with him.

Just because Negro clients, whatever their social class, have been, and continue to be, exposed to a virulent form of social pathology, the counselor must not assume that they will necessarily need or want help related to this situation (Fibush, 1965). If he conveys his understanding of the client's socio-cultural problem when the client is seeking understanding of his vocational or educational problem, he is conveying his understanding of the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Although Phillips (1959, 1960, 1961) indicates that white counselors cannot successfully counsel Negro students because of barriers they cannot penetrate, the evidence is not thoroughly convincing. Cultural differences seem to be more causative of strained rapport than race, since it is observed that Negro clients are often suspicious of Negro counselors, too.

In effect, the Negro client and the professional counselor are literally "worlds apart," especially in terms of how the ghetto individual perceives the professional. He anticipates, due to his conditioning in the ghetto, that the role of a counselor in a structured, middle-class setting is a false one, because not only has there been absence of caring for him in the slums, but also, if he were to really tell him about the almost insurmountable problems that he faces, that the counselor would be powerless to do anything about them, or even worse, just not care (Sewell, 1967). If the Negro client sees the white counselor as the "enemy," he may see the Negro authoritarian figure as something far worse--the collaborator with the enemy. Thus, the problems of relating to the culturally different Negro are somewhat the same for the Negro counselor as they are for his white counter-part.

It would seem fruitful for counselors to become less concerned about racial differences in the counseling relationship and more attentative to the personality structure of those whom they serve. It is important to recognize that Negroes feel their minority status so deeply that they are unwilling to bare their feelings, even to each other (English, 1957). This phenomenon has direct implications for counseling, as Jourard and Lasakow (1958) indicate: that Negroes consistently disclose less about themselves than do whites. Their research would suggest that counselors should find it easiest to establish a meaningful relationship with white females, first; white males, second; Negro females, next; and Negro males, last.

It has also been observed that Negroes put up a terrible struggle within themselves not to be angry (Karon, 1958, p. 45). Their anger and hostility are denied. As a result, there is general diminution and

constriction of their emotional life. Their continuous attempt to suppress genuine feelings is insidious and terribly damaging not only to self-esteem, but to spontaneity and freedom of expression as well (Lief, 1962). Ridigity and lack of spontaneity are especially noticeable among middle-class Negroes (Vontress, 1967b). Although such individuals are reluctant to disclose themselves in a counseling dyad, they are even more reluctant to talk about themselves and their feelings in group settings.

Conclusions

Although the four cultural minorities differ one from the other, a common thread runs through all of them: their suspicion of, and reserve toward, the dominant cultural group and its representatives. Since it is the professional's role to assist the non-professional in some way, it is therefore incumbent upon him to break through cultural barriers.

To accomplish this goal, it seems necessary to revamp counselor-training efforts and curricula in this country. Counselors need a broad understanding of national and international cultural differences. Numerous cultural minorities exist in the American society. Representatives of distant cultures are continuously coming and going in this country. Foreign students are enrolling in American colleges and universities in swelling numbers; children of foreign officials stationed in the United States are studying in public and private schools at all levels.

In fact, it appears that as the profession grows in expertise and as the counselor's publics make more demands on him, his previous training no longer suffices. It is now doubtful that he can obtain adequate

training in one or two years to do the job demanded. If counseling is a profession--and obviously it is, it would seem that pre-professional training should be provided. This suggests the need for an undergraduate pre-professional degree which is designed to give counselors the necessary undergirding in anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Presently, persons pursuing graduate degrees in counseling represent almost every undergraduate major one can think of: industrial arts, music, English, French, engineering, agriculture, and the like. It is doubtful that a year or two of graduate work in the tricks of the trade can prepare such individuals to cope with the nodous problems discussed in this article.

Further, it seems necessary that counselor training in this country extricate itself from the educational context and environment in which it is now entangled. Carefully watched over and groomed by officious educationists in colleges and universities, counselors are still receiving training which suggests that schools are the only setting in which they will work. In this connection, there appears to be little rationale or logic for the continued requirement that counselors have from one to three years of teaching experience before they are officially certified. Such requirements discourage some of the most alert and sensitive people from going into a profession that begs for professionals capable of relating to the culturally different.

Although there is a pressing need to address attention to revamping counselor training curricula and procedures in this country, perhaps a more pressing need is that of helping counselors already in service. The problems inherent in counseling cultural minorities in our society demand that well organized and continuous in-service training programs be put into effect in all quarters where counselors work. These programs should

be concerned not just with acquainting counselors with the nature and needs of various cultural sub-groups, but they should also be designed to help counselors assess their attitudes toward such groups.

It is a matter of common experience that one finds it more difficult to establish empathy with those who are different from him (Katz, 1963, p. 6). It is also obvious that prejudice toward various groups in this country is quiet prevalent. Undoubtedly, many counselors feel guilty about remnants of prejudice which they harbor within themselves. This suggests that counselors themselves need to experience group counseling, so that they can examine themselves and their feelings toward the culturally different. The attitudinal ingredients of a beneficial interpersonal relationship about which Rogers (1962) talks are not acquired automatically. Many counselors need help in developing them.

Today, there is much talk about the efficacy of para-professionals, especially in terms of relating to people trapped in the nation's ghettoes. In fact, one gets the impression often that professional counselors apologize for their training; that they, therefore, relinquish gladly their responsibilities to indigenous workers, who relate without difficulty to people whom they, the counselors, should be serving. This is an unfortunate state of affairs. If counselors find themselves in unfamiliar settings working with culturally different individuals, it is their responsibility to fill in gaps in their training. Sitting back, apologizing for their training, or delegating counselor functions to people with little or no training undoubtedly reinforces the suspicions that cultural minorities have of dominant group members.

To be sure, rapport difficulties may constitute some problems, initially, but they are not insurmountable. Counselors can bridge cultural barriers,

if they want to. When the counselee senses that the counselor is able, despite cultural differences, to understand not only his special circumstances and problems, but to identify as well with him in his struggle to meet his emotional and material needs, the counselee and the counselor can establish positive rapport with which many problems can be solved.

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